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ABSTRACT

Growing from an intense interest in community control of education in the mid-1960s, the National Teacher Corps indicated that its programs must reflect shared decision making at the local level. More specifically, guidelines for programs stipulated that parents, representatives of the local community, state educational personnel, higher education personnel, professional association representatives, teachers, and administrators be involved in collaborative decision making. The suggested vehicle for involvement was identified as the "school-community council." Unfortunately, guidelines were vague with respect to the nature of the involvement at the local level. Time limitations, bureaucratic "red tape," and the composition of the local steering committee to include individuals whose needs are often at odds with each other have compounded the problem. What can be done to make these groups more effective? Collaboration seems to depend a great deal on the clarity with which each of the collaborators understands his or her own goals to program design. In addition, a firm resolution by communities and colleges not to sell their own opportunity to design effective programs for a few dollars will carry a message that real collaboration begins with people. (JA)

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TEACHER CORPS IN VERMONT:

THE QUESTION OF PARITY

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Growing from an intense interest in community control of education in the mid 1960's, National Teacher Corps indicated that its programs must reflect shared decision making at the local level. More specifically, guidelines for programs stipulated that parents, representatives of the local community, state educational department personnel, representatives of other education projects, higher education personnel, professional association representatives, teachers and administrators be involved in collaborative decision making. The suggested vehicle for involvement was identified as the "school-community council".

As might be expected, guidelines in the national program were vague with respect to the nature of involvement at the local level. Local programs were thus expected to define the roles of the community, university, state and profession with respect to project governance. Some limitations were obviously placed on the roles by requirements of the time limitation on proposal development and by the need for a centralized project management system.

Problems which arise from these limitations reduce the effectiveness of the management councils (or steering committees as they are called in Vermont). For example, in a rural New England state a project should be planned at the local level. Experience during the past five years has taught institutions of higher education the painful lesson that local educators and communities must participate in the design of preservice and inservice programs.

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Guidelines for program development were rarely released by the Congress more than two months prior to the due date of applications. Hardly enough time was allocated for the coordination of several different communities in the planning process.

Federal programs which have a common purpose in a number of local sites, such as the training of specialists, also have the purpose of serving needs defined by the host community. The concommitant need for program administration across many localities seems to have the effect of layering bureaucracy. Since the bureaucracy is seen as eminating from either the state or the university it calls into question a fundamental goal of parity, namely the perception of real decision making at the local level.

As if this were not enough, the composition of the local steering committee brings together such disparate (and sometimes desperate) goal seekers as professors, whose needs for emphasizing the education of teachers and research are sometimes perceived as being at odds with the particular needs for service of parents, teachers, and community agency workers.

What can be done to make these groups more effective? Collaboration seems to depend a great deal on the clarity with which each of the collaborators understands his or her own goals prior to program design. This notion supports the effort of schools and communities as well as higher education to engage in an on going process of needs assessment and goals clarification. In addition, a firm resolution by communities and colleges not to sell their own opportunity to design effective programs for a few federal dollars will carry a message that real collaboration begins with people.